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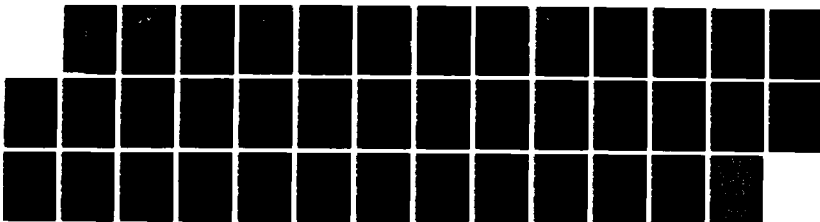
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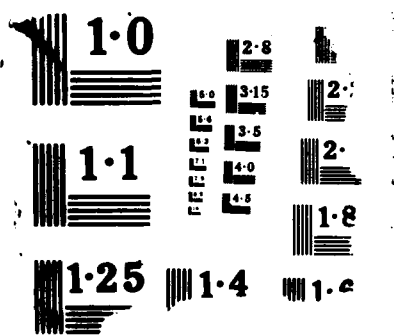
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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

UNITED STATES  
PERSIAN GULF POLICY  
SINCE 1968

MAJOR TOMMY GENE GATES

88-0485

"insights into tomorrow"

AD-A194 926

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**REPORT NUMBER** 88-0485  
**TITLE** UNITED STATES PERSIAN GULF POLICY SINCE 1968

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requirements for graduation.

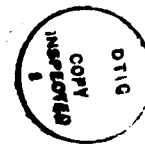
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## PREFACE

1. This research paper provides a historical overview of the United States Persian Gulf policy since 1968. The paper shows how the United States has gone from a bystander in the Gulf to a key player in less than 30 years. The paper specifically examines the administrations--Nixon, Carter, and Reagan--which have had the greatest impact on policy toward this region.

2. This paper will be incorporated into the Middle East Area Studies program at ACSC.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Cates is a 1973 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute where he received a BA in History and was commissioned through the AFROTC program. Following graduation from navigator training in 1974, he was assigned to the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing, Pope AFB, North Carolina flying C-130E's. Major Cates was reassigned to Mather AFB in 1979 where he served as an instructor and as a wing curriculum manager. He left Mather in 1982 for an assignment to the Middle East where he served in southern Lebanon as a United Nations Military Observer attached to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. Following his assignment overseas, he had a rated supplement tour in intelligence and served as a national current intelligence officer with the Defense Intelligence Agency. While in DIA, his area of emphasis was Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and the Persian Gulf region. He also served as a watch officer for the Middle East in the National Military Intelligence Center. In addition to his degree in history, Major Cates has a MBA in Management from Golden Gate University. Major Cates completed SOS in residence and has completed ACSC in seminar. He is presently attending ACSC in residence.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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"insights into tomorrow"

**REPORT NUMBER** 88-0485

**AUTHOR(S)** MAJOR TOMMY GENE CATES, USAF

**TITLE** UNITED STATES PERSIAN GULF POLICY SINCE 1968

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a historical background of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf so that the reader might better understand present U.S. involvement there.
2. The paper examines the policies of the three administrations--Nixon, Carter, and Reagan--which have had the greatest impact on U.S. policy in this strategic area. The study begins in 1968 with Britain's announcement that it was withdrawing its forces from the Gulf and continues through the present U.S. policy of escorting Kuwaiti tankers through the Gulf. The paper shows how the U.S. has gone from a bystander to a key player in less than 30 years. Finally, the paper addresses possible options for future policy in this area.
3. The paper is primarily for people who have little or no knowledge of the U.S. past involvement in the Gulf.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

U.S. concerns over the security and military defense of the Persian Gulf have steadily intensified during the last 45 years, although the nature and relative importance of U.S. interests in the area have varied. The significance of the region has tended to increase as the result of growing United States and Western dependence on Persian Gulf and Middle East oil and the need to assure continued access to the region's vast oil reserves (12:1). A March 1987 U.S. Department of Energy study, "Energy Security: A Report to the President of the United States," underscores the current and growing importance of Gulf oil to the free world, noting that, as of January 1987, 63% of the free world's proven oil reserves could be found in the Gulf area (16:58). Gulf oil currently accounts for approximately one-fourth of total world production and is forecast to return to the 35-45% level of the mid-1970s over the next decade (16:58).

Although the United States reliance on Gulf oil is relatively low, U.S. consumption has more than doubled from 1985 to 1986 and is now about 7% of U.S. total consumption or 15% of U.S. imports (16:58). Our allies in Western Europe and Northeast Asia have a much greater dependence on Persian Gulf oil with over 50% of Western Europe's oil and over 75% of Japan's oil coming from the region (16:58). Underlining the importance of the region to the West, Secretary of State George Shultz made the following statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 27 January 1987:

Stability in the Persian Gulf is critical to the economic health of the West. An interruption in the flow of oil or control of these energy resources by an unfriendly power could have devastating effects on the pattern of world trade and on our economy. (20:214).

A second American interest in the Gulf has been to contain the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. The region's strategic location and its vital shipping lanes

makes it critical in the East-West conflict. The Soviet Union and its allies must not be allowed to control the oil fields. Additionally, the "huge amounts of capital the oil-producing countries hold" (11:433) must be kept from Moscow's control.

Regional stability has been a third American interest, as access to oil will be more reliable if countries in the area are not disrupted by internal and external strife. Revolutions might cause nonaligned states to move closer to the Soviet Union or disrupt states that maintain close relations with the United States. Additionally, radical change may produce governments more hostile to their neighbors and thus eager to fight (11:433).

While American military and security interests originated around the time of World War II, it was not until after 1971 that the U.S. became increasingly and directly concerned with the defense of the region and Western interests there (1:1). Prior to 1971, the responsibility for the region's security fell to the British, with the United States maintaining a supportive role (3:21-23). However, on 18 January 1968, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson made the following announcement to the House of Commons:

We have decided to accelerate the withdrawal of our forces from their stations in the Far East...by the end of 1971. We have also decided to withdraw our forces from the Persian Gulf by the same date...(6:85).

These words set the stage for America's future involvement in the Persian Gulf.

American policy in the Gulf since 1968 falls into two distinctive phases: 1968-78 and 1979 to the present. U.S. policy towards the Gulf during the first phase was predicated on the Nixon Doctrine, which specified "that the United States would furnish military and economic assistance to nations whose freedom was threatened, but would look to those nations to assume primary responsibility for their own defense" (5:22). Overextended in Southeast Asia, the U.S. was in no position to police the Gulf by itself. The Nixon Doctrine was accompanied by a supplementary approach which came to be known as the "twin pillar" policy (4:13). Using the guidelines of the Nixon Doctrine, the U.S. relied upon Iran and, to a lesser degree, Saudi Arabia, as its surrogates in the Gulf. But since Iran was the militarily more significant partner in this arrangement, Washington spared no effort to build up the Shah's forces, partly in an

effort to enhance Iran's ability to police the Gulf and partly to satisfy the insistent demands of the Shah and induce his flexibility on oil pricing issues (12:146).

By the mid-1970s, this policy had begun to pay promising dividends. The vacuum created by the 1971 British military withdrawal was beginning to be filled by the local nations of the Gulf (4:13). The twin pillar policy was at its height during the Nixon-Ford administrations and was continued, with little change, throughout most of the Carter presidency. However, two events in 1979, the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, signaled the end of the Nixon Doctrine and the beginning of a more aggressive U.S. policy which subsequently came to be known as the Carter Doctrine.

The Carter Doctrine signaled a new resolve on the part of Washington to forsake the use of surrogates to carry out American interests and thus commit the U.S. to a course of protecting the Persian Gulf through its own resources. In practical terms, the new policy hurried the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force which later evolved into the U.S. Central Command (12:147).

The broad outlines of the Carter Doctrine have not only been reaffirmed by the Reagan Administration but have also been expanded in response to the Iran/Iraq War. The expansion of the Carter Doctrine is evident at present with the U.S. having over 30 combat and support ships in the Gulf to escort Kuwaiti tankers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the U.S. policy in the Gulf by looking historically at the three administrations--Nixon, Carter, and Reagan--which have had the greatest impact on policy toward this region. Finally, the paper will give some possible options for future U.S. policy in this region.

## Chapter Two

### NIXON DOCTRINE ERA 1968-1979

When President Richard M. Nixon first took office, the United States claimed to have the military capability to fight, successfully, 2 1/2 wars simultaneously. In other words, the U.S. supposedly had the capability to assist Western Europe against a major Soviet assault, to defeat any aggressive move in the Pacific Far East by the People's Republic of China, and at the same time fight a smaller contingency somewhere else in the world (4:12). However, after examining existing U.S. armed forces, the President, with his National Security Adviser, Dr. Henry Kissinger, concluded the U.S. did not possess the required military strength nor was projected to have the strength in the near future (4:12). In short, the 2 1/2 war strategy was "little more than a paper exercise which would assuredly be found wanting should it ever be called to account" (4:12).

Accordingly, an analysis of existing U.S. global commitments was initiated, and the findings resulted in the formation of the Nixon Doctrine, which was first announced by the President in a speech on Guam on 25 July 1968 (23:3). Basically, the Doctrine stated that the U.S. could or would no longer dedicate itself to "unilateral policing of the trouble spots existing around the world" (4:13). Instead, primary responsibility for local security would have to be assumed by regional countries themselves, although the U.S. would supply military hardware and training to help the nations do the job. However, the Nixon Doctrine did not rule out possible U.S. intervention. It added that the U.S. would provide naval and air support if the local countries clearly could not cope with a severe external threat and, as a last resort, American ground forces would be committed to guarantee preservation of regional stability (4:13). Although the Doctrine provided the rationale for arming the South Vietnamese Army so that it could take over responsibility for defending South Vietnam, it was nowhere else more evident than in the Persian Gulf (3:35).

Following the British announcement that their forces would be withdrawn from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, the U.S. feared that, unless steps were taken before the British withdrawal, a dangerous military vacuum would be created in the Gulf. It was argued that the Soviet Union could move to fill this vacuum and therefore jeopardize Western access to the region's oil resources (3:34). Although senior administration officials were worried about the security of the Gulf, they realized that the American public, already divided over the war effort in Vietnam, would not support an active U.S. involvement in the Gulf (6:84). In this environment and under the guidelines of the Nixon Doctrine, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Joseph Sisco, stated before Congress in August 1972 that Washington's interests and policies toward the region were the following:

- (1) Support orderly political development and regional cooperation to assure the tranquility and progress of the area.
- (2) Support local governments in maintaining their independence and assuring peace, progress, and regional cooperation without our interfering in the domestic affairs of these friendly countries.
- (3) Encourage Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the smaller states to cooperate wholeheartedly with one another to assure that the region remains secure.
- (4) Assist in the modernization of the armed forces of Iran and Saudi Arabia to enable them to provide effectively for their own security and to foster the security of the region as a whole.
- (5) Extend Washington's diplomatic presence into the area.
- (6) Continue to maintain a small American naval contingent at Bahrain which has for a quarter century carried out the mission of visiting friendly ports in the region to symbolize American interest (9:100-101).

The fourth principle became the key point in U.S. policy which came to be known as the "twin pillar" policy. Iran and Saudi Arabia would constitute "twin stanchions upon which would rest not only the security of the region itself but that of American national interests" (4:13). The rationale for this twin pillar policy was threefold:

(1) The U.S. had enjoyed close relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia for more than two decades, hence they were expected to serve as reliable regional surrogates.

(2) Both Iran and Saudi Arabia, as conservative monarchical states, shared American anxieties regarding future Soviet expansion in the region.

(3) Iran's burgeoning military power combined with Saudi Arabia's financial assets, enhanced by rising oil prices, would constitute a formidable, if indirect instrument of American policy in the Gulf (1:30).

Although the U.S. policy was known as the twin pillars policy, Iran and Saudi Arabia were not really two interchangeable pillars. Saudi Arabia's importance in this policy was due to its possession of the world's largest oil fields and its emerging influence in pan-Arab politics and councils. At this time Saudi Arabia was still in the early stages of developing a rounded military capability. Iran was by far the more significant partner due to its much larger population, relatively more developed economy, and more powerful armed forces (11:146). Additionally, the Shah's insistence that non-regional states be disqualified to fill the power vacuum in the Gulf and his dream to make Iran the paramount power in the area coincided with the objectives of the U.S. (1:33).

The special relationship of the Nixon administration's with the Shah was established in May 1972, when the President and Henry Kissinger, returning from the Moscow summit, visited the Shah in Teheran. By this time, Britain's forces had departed from the Gulf and several events in the Middle East caused Kissinger to believe the balance of power in the region was in grave jeopardy. Syria had invaded Jordan in 1970, and Syria's relationship with the Soviet Union was well established. Egypt had signed a friendship treaty with the Soviets in 1971, and over 15,000 Soviet troops were still in Egypt. The Soviets had concluded a similar treaty with Iraq only seven weeks before the Nixon visit and had begun deliveries of advanced modern



weapons to Iraq. In Kissinger's view, it was imperative that the regional balance of power be maintained (5:24). Since Iran was willing to fill the vacuum left by Britain and was willing to pay for the necessary equipment out of its own revenues. Washington was willing to grant the Shah a virtual carte blanche in arms purchases, except for nuclear weapons (1:34). The President accepted quietly the Shah's desire to obtain advanced American aircraft and insisted that future Iranian requests not be second-guessed. In short, the decision on what military equipment Iran could acquire would be left to Iran and review procedures would be eliminated (5:24). In July 1972, Kissinger issued a policy guideline for the National Security Council, stating that "decisions on the acquisition of military equipment should be left primarily to the Government of Iran" (1:34). Defense and State Department reviews of subsequent arms transfers to Iran became routine (1:34). In addition, the U.S. promised to provide technicians to train Iran's armed forces in the use and maintenance of advanced weapons and underwrite Iran's support for the Kurdish nationalist insurgency against Iraq (1:34).

Over the next five years the most striking feature of the Washington-Teheran relationship was the unprecedented magnitude and high technological level of weapons which the U.S. supplied Iran. From 1950 to 1971, U.S. arms sales to Iran were approximately \$1.2 billion. Over a five-year period between 1971 and 1976, Iran's total purchases were nearly \$12 billion. In 1972 U.S. arms sales to Iran were \$519 million, in 1973 \$2.2 billion, and in 1974 \$4.3 billion (1:35). The value of arms transactions in 1974 alone was twice the value of all arms purchases contracted during the 22 years prior to the Arab oil embargo (5:26). One U.S. Congressman called it "the most rapid military build-up of military power under peacetime conditions of any nation in the history of the world (3:94). In the 1970s the U.S. sales program to Iran was the largest in the world (1:35).

The Iranian Air Force and Navy were the major recipients of U.S. military equipment. The Iranian Air Force purchased F-14s and F-16s as well as an elaborate air defense system to include HAWK surface-to-air missiles. As for the Iranian Navy, three diesel submarines and four Spruance-class destroyers were purchased. The Shah himself maintained close supervision over the purchase of all U.S. equipment, summing up his role as follows: "The arms I choose. All the systems I choose" (1:35).

It was not long before the Shah asserted his newly acquired military strength. In 1973, at the invitation of Sultan Qabus of Oman, the Shah sent three thousand troops to

crush a South Yemeni-backed rebellion in the Dhofar province. This marked the most important instance of Iran's policing role in the Gulf (1:38: 3:94).

Even though Saudi Arabia was destined to play a subordinate role to Iran under the U.S. twin pillar policy, its long-standing "special relationship" with the U.S. was significantly strengthened after 1971. As with the U.S. policy in Iran, there was a massive increase in U.S. arms sales and contracts for training personnel. Between 1971 and 1976, U.S. arms sales and contracts for training personnel totaled over \$7 billion. Following the large increase in the world price of oil in 1973-74, arms sales to Saudi Arabia jumped from \$709 million in 1973 to over \$2.5 billion in 1974 (1:44).

From the U.S. perspective, the twin pillars policy was working fine in the Gulf. In Nixon's fourth report to Congress (3 May 1973), the President's references to the Persian Gulf were positive. He offered praise to the Gulf states for their efforts in assuming responsibility for their own security. Additionally, he stated that Iran and Saudi Arabia had "undertaken greater responsibility for helping to enhance the area's stability..." (9:99-100). Nixon also stated that as United States and other industrial nations' energy demands increased, the need for Persian Gulf oil would also increase. Therefore "assurance of the continuing flow of Middle East energy resources is increasingly important for the United States, Western Europe, and Japan" (9:99-100). This marks one of the earliest statements by a President over the importance of the oil resources in the Persian Gulf.

Shortly after President Nixon's report, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near East, African, and South Asian Affairs, James H. Noyes, again emphasized the importance of the region's energy resources when he testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He stated the U.S. had three main security interests in the Gulf:

- (1) Containment of Soviet power within its present borders.
- (2) Free movement of U.S. ships and aircraft into and out of the area.
- (3) Access to Persian Gulf oil (24:39).

An event occurred in 1973 that had a profound effect on future U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. This was the 1973

Arab-Israeli War. The Arab oil embargo, levied as a result of the October war caused a major readjustment of U.S. policy priorities in the Gulf (6:85). U.S. and Western Europe economic vulnerability to the oil embargo underscored the strategic importance of the region, which was recognized as vital. Oil and economic matters were placed on an equal footing with strategic interests (6:85). In a statement of U.S. policy objectives in the Gulf to the Congress on 24 October 1975, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Sidney Sober, after reaffirming the twin pillar policy, added the following objectives:

- (1) Continued access to the region's oil supplies at reasonable prices and in sufficient quantities to meet our needs and those of our allies.

- (2) Employment by the oil exporters of their rapidly growing incomes in constructive ways to foster sound economic development and support of the international system (6:85).

Also as a result of the Arab-Israeli War, the U.S. reevaluated its strategy in the Indian Ocean and concluded that it could not place heavy emphasis on allied support. This judgment, along with heightened suspicions of a growing Soviet military presence in the region, had two important consequences; the U.S. Pacific Fleet's periodic deployment in the Indian Ocean and the expansion of Diego Garcia from a communications station to a naval facility capable of supporting major air and naval deployments (5:25).

Although Iran and Saudi Arabia were the primary countries of interest during the early 70s, the U.S. did not overlook the other states in the region. The U.S. established a military relationship with Kuwait in the early 1970s. Washington's interest in Kuwait was based on its importance as a major oil exporter and its position in the "moderate grouping of Arab states" (1:57). Because of tensions between Kuwait and Iraq over their unresolved border dispute, the U.S. took steps to bolster Kuwait's defenses by selling them a Hawk missile system and A-4 aircraft. Between 1973-76, U.S. arms sales to Kuwait totaled \$600 million (1:57).

The U.S. relationship with the Sultanate of Oman rested on the control of the Strait of Hormuz "choke" point which Oman shared with Iran, and the pronounced pro-American sentiments held by its ruler. In July 1976 it was announced that U.S. Navy P-3 aircraft, flying from the U.S. facilities

at Diego Garcia would be allowed to make landings for refueling purposes on Masirah Island which was under Oman's jurisdiction (1:58).

U.S. interest in the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) is based upon the YAR's strategic location along the strait of Bab al-Mandeb across from the Horn of Africa, its close connection with Saudi Arabia, its vulnerability to pressure from the adjacent Marxist Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), and its susceptibility to offers of military and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and its client Iraq. Between 1972 and 1975, the U.S. and the YAR maintained a direct relationship, involving a modest program of U.S. arms sales totaling only \$3 million. Beginning in 1976 there occurred a shift to an indirect relationship, with Saudi Arabia serving as a filter for U.S. military aid to North Yemen (1:58-59).

U.S. relations with the state of Bahrain had a special character. Prior to the independence which Bahrain gained in 1971, Britain controlled its foreign relations. Britain agreed to share certain port facilities with a small unit of U.S. Navy ships, designated as Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR). In the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Bahrain cancelled the 1971 agreement on MIDEASTFOR. Bahrain rescinded this action late in 1974 but increased the annual rent charged the U.S. from \$600,000 to \$4 million (1:56-57).

The Nixon-Ford presidencies marked the highpoint of U.S.-Iranian cooperation in the Gulf. However, the election of Jimmy Carter marked the beginning of a change in the relationship between Iran and the United States and thus a change in U.S. policy toward the Persian Gulf.

Three policy innovations of the Carter administration had direct relevance for the Persian Gulf. They were a new, more controlled arms policy, a promotion of universal values such as human rights, and a determined effort to bring about a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict (1:69; 2:13). Iran was chiefly affected by the new arms transfer and human rights policies, with Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent, the other Gulf states by the arms transfer policy and American peace efforts (1:69).

In May 1977, President Carter issued Presidential Directive 13 which set new guidelines for U.S. arms sales. Henceforth arms transfers would be regarded

...as an exceptional foreign policy implement, used only where it could be clearly demonstrated that the transfer contributes to our national security interests....The burden of persuasion will be placed on those who favored a particular sale rather than those who opposed it (1:70).

The guidelines provided for the following restrictions on future arms sales:

(1) A dollar ceiling would be placed on the volume of new arms commitments with the total for the fiscal year 1978 less than the previous year, to be followed by subsequent annual reductions.

(2) The U.S. would not be the first supplier to introduce into a region like the Persian Gulf newly developed, advanced weapons systems which would create significantly higher combat capability (1:71).

This less permissive approach had an almost immediate impact. In July 1977, Iran's request for 250 F-18L aircraft was refused. The reason given was that the aircraft was not operationally deployed with U.S. forces. In July 1978 a request for advanced electronics for the F-4G was also refused. In addition, the Carter administration sought, where possible, either to defer or to scale down requests. Iran's request for a second group of 150 F-16s was postponed in 1977-78 (2:13).

Seeing the new approach in Washington, the Shah resorted to tactics which had proven successful in the past to gain military equipment he wanted. In 1976-77 the Shah hinted in interviews that if arms sales to Iran were curtailed he would:

(1) Retaliate by limiting trade with the U.S.

(2) Reconsider Iran's regional role in promoting stability.

(3) Buy arms from the USSR.

(4) Be "difficult" on issues relating to non-proliferation (2:12).

Although the Carter administration sought to cut back on military arms transfers, it still sought to maintain its ties with Iran. It therefore supported the arms commitments it had inherited from the Ford administration to include convincing a skeptical Congress of Iran's need for six AWACS as well as supporting Iran's request for the first group of 150 F-16s to be delivered early in the 1980s (2:13-14). However, due to future events, the aircraft would never be delivered to Iran.

## Chapter Three

### THE CARTER DOCTRINE ERA 1980-PRESENT

A series of events in the region beginning in 1979 signaled the end of the Nixon Doctrine and the beginning of a more aggressive U.S. policy which subsequently became known as the Carter Doctrine. These events included:

- (1) The downfall of the Shah's regime in Iran and the revolution that followed.
- (2) The short border war between the Yemens.
- (3) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- (4) The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (11:146).

The event which likely had the greatest effect in forcing a change in policy was the fall of the Shah in early 1979. Without the Shah, there could be no surrogate policy in the region. Saudi Arabia was not able to take over that role. Additionally, the Carter administration saw the Iranian revolution, in itself, as being a threat to Gulf security (11:146).

Iran, which had enjoyed basically good relations with the Arab world under the Shah, now was antagonizing many Arab countries, most notably its neighbor Iraq. Islamic leaders in Teheran were calling for Shiite minorities in the Gulf states to rise up. The conservative, Sunni-led monarchies were not only offended but were worried by the revolutionary rhetoric coming from Teheran (3:114).

Washington's approach toward Iran during this time was one of caution. This was understandable since the U.S. had a "burdensome past" to live down after being totally identified with the Shah for over three decades (2:13). However, the U.S. believed important interests were at stake. Washington wanted to do all it could to prevent a possible communist or leftist takeover in Iran which would

further unsettle the Gulf region. More importantly, the U.S. was concerned about the continuation of the export of oil to the U.S. and to its European and Japanese allies. Therefore, administration officials attempted to "normalize relations and to avoid offending or giving the impression that the government was intent on containing or isolating the new regime. In short, Washington sought to show that it was prepared "to do business" with the new authorities in Teheran (2:17).

As the trouble continued to mount in Iran, the U.S. gave increased attention to its own military to develop the capability to deploy forces to that part of the world. This increased capability involved the strengthening of both U.S. forces and facilities in the area where they could stage and operate. During 1979, that included not only the further development of the base at Diego Garcia, but also involved negotiations with the governments of Oman, Kenya, Somalia, and Egypt for future U.S. access to military facilities in their countries (8:63; 3:141).

During this time period, important policy statements by two key officials in the Carter Cabinet alluded that the U.S. was dropping its non-interventionist position of the past decade and was prepared to use its own military forces to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf (1:85). On Face the Nation, Carter's Defense Secretary, Harold Brown, said that protection of the oil flow from the Middle East "is clearly part of the U.S. vital interest and that in the protection of those vital interests the U.S. would take any action that was appropriate, including the use of military force" (3:123).

In a separate interview, James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Energy, said the Carter administration was considering a plan to establish an American military presence in the Persian Gulf region. Reiterating that the U.S. had "vital interests in the Persian Gulf," (3:123-124) he added that the "United States must move in such a way that it protected those interests, even if it involved the use of military strength, of military presence" (1:85-86).

The sudden war between South Yemen and North Yemen in March 1979 provided the administration with an opportunity to demonstrate its possible new role in the Gulf region. The U.S. was basically acting in support of Saudi interests. The Saudis perceived South Yemen's attack on North Yemen as a "calculated PDRY-Cuban-Soviet probe to overthrow the relatively conservative government of North Yemen and test Saudi and Western reactions" (1:86-87).



Shortly after the U.S. received an appeal for assistance from the Saudis, President Carter invoked for the first time the emergency provisions of the 1976 Arms Export Control Act which authorized the President to initiate arms shipments without the delay of a Congressional review (1:87). On March 8, the President approved a military aid package of \$390 million worth of armaments, including 12 F-5E aircraft, tanks, and personnel carriers (3:120-121). The arms package was to be delivered within two weeks. Although the war came to a sudden end on March 17, the President's actions served as a basis for the United States' new approach for safeguarding the Gulf area (3:123).

The taking of American hostages in Iran in early November 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 made a new policy inevitable and President Carter's State of the Union address on the following January officially ended the Nixon Doctrine Era.

On 23 January 1980, in his State of the Union address, President Carter announced a new American policy that came to be known as the Carter Doctrine (14:73). In a definitive statement of U.S. policy to meet the threat posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter stated:

Let our position be absolutely clear: any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force (1:95).

Carter was the first President to state that the Persian Gulf region was a "vital interest" to the United States. With the announcement of the Carter Doctrine, the United States committed itself to a course of protecting the Persian Gulf through its own resources. It could no longer, as it did during the Shah's rule, depend on Iran to serve as its surrogate in the area. The military vacuum created by the Shah's overthrow would be filled by American power (1:146).

However, almost immediately after Carter's statement, his Secretary of Defense let it be publicly known that the U.S. did not, at the time, possess sufficient deployable military power to enforce the President's warning (4:16). If America's new Persian Gulf policy was to be credible to the Soviets and among its Third World allies, there had to be an increase in available military power in these regions. And for the United States to be able to project its military strength in these areas on a sustained basis, it had to have

at its disposal military bases or at a minimum, access to military facilities (3:136).

As for access to military facilities, the U.S. announced in February 1980 that it had concluded agreements with Oman, Kenya, and Somalia giving American forces access to their facilities. In Oman, the U.S. gained increased access to the airstrip on Masirah Island and to the port of Muscat. In Kenya, American ships would have access to the port of Mombasa and its facilities on an assured basis. Under the agreement with Somalia, the United States would have access to the port at Berbera. While the port required repairs, a 15,000 foot runway nearby could be used by American aircraft. Under the terms of the agreements, each country received a certain amount of arms and economic assistance in exchange for use of their facilities. Oman was promised \$100 million, Kenya \$53 million, and Somalia \$45 million, not counting \$111 million for refugee and development aid in Somalia over the following two years (3:141-142). However, it should be noted that the formal agreements with Oman, Somalia, and Kenya were concluded mainly because access was available there, not because those states were particularly well-suited for providing peacetime and crisis-related support for our military forces (12:76).

As for the development of appropriate military forces necessary for direct American action if called upon, the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine hurried the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force and its evolution into the U.S. Central Command (11:147).

The idea of a rapid deployment force was not a Carter invention. The idea had its roots back to the early 1960s during the tenure of Robert McNamara as Secretary of Defense. Essentially, the original idea held that, if means could be found to place in advance heavy military equipment in an area of possible future trouble, the associated combat personnel could be retained in the continental U.S. Then in the event of trouble, the troops could be quickly flown to the hot spot in question, together with their personal equipment and weapons. The heavy items such as tanks, trucks, artillery, and ammunition would already be on station. This concept was known as the Fast Deployment Logistics (FDL) plan (4:41). For a number of reasons, this program was never implemented.

Even during the Carter administration, the President saw the possible need of a fast reaction type of force prior to his announcement of the Carter Doctrine. He issued Presidential Review Memorandum No. 10 (PRIM-10) in July 1977, which ordered an interagency study on the use of quick

reaction forces other than in Europe and Korea. Nevertheless, there was opposition to the plan in the Pentagon, where there was concern that it would divert resources from Western Europe, and in the State Department, where it was felt that the intervention unit would be politically provocative. As a result, little had been done during 1978 to bring such a force into being. Instead, the administration stayed with the Gulf strategy favored during the previous administrations of relying on Iran to protect Western interests (3:129). However, the President's State of the Union address placed the development of the Rapid Deployment Force on the front burner and the Rapid Deployment Joint Task force (RDJTF) officially came into being on 1 March 1980 (11:153). In its initial stages, the RDJTF was primarily oriented toward prospective crises in the Indian Ocean, and the first ships loaded with prepositioned military equipment reached their holding area at Diego Garcia in July 1980 (4:43). The RDJTF would grow significantly during the Reagan administration.

Carter's Persian Gulf policy during his last year in office was completely focused on getting the hostages out of Teheran. The hostages were released on the day that Ronald Reagan took office as President of the United States.

## Chapter Four

### THE REAGAN YEARS

The underlying premise of the incoming Reagan Administration's strategy toward the Persian Gulf region was aptly summed up in an article by Paul H. Nitze in the fall 1980 issue of Foreign Affairs:

The principal task of the early 1980's must be to check, blunt and so far as possible, frustrate the integrated Soviet strategies while the energies of many nations similarly threatened have an opportunity to become mobilized and linked so as to reverse the currently adverse trends in the correlation of forces (13:52).

In line with the Carter Doctrine, the administration saw the Soviet Union as the primary and greatest threat to the region. In October 1982, Reagan's Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, summarized the administration's perspective:

We confronted a situation where strategic passivity during the Ford administration and the excessive piety of the Carter administration's human rights crusade had sapped the will of authoritarian anti-communist governments, eroded the confidence of Western allies, and encouraged risk taking by the Soviet Union and by Soviet manipulated totalitarian regimes. Since 1975, this bipartisan policy of failure had permitted the Soviet Union to inflict disastrous defeats on the United States at regular six month intervals....If present trends are not arrested, the convergence of rising international disorder, greater Western vulnerability, and growing Soviet military power will undo the international codes of conduct that foster the resolution of disputes between nations (11:4.22).

In this context the administration emphasized, and sometimes overstated, the capabilities of Moscow's prospective and real regional allies. Richard Allen, then

national security advisor, explained in September 1981, for example, that the threat to the Gulf "could come from a destabilized Iran, from Ethiopia, from Yemen or elsewhere....The situation has changed dramatically in the last four years (11:438).

Using the Soviet threat as its focal point, and with Secretary of State Haig as the architect, the administration at first embraced the idea of "strategic consensus" in which a goal was to "persuade the diverse countries of the region to put aside local parochial security concerns and unite with the U.S. in an alliance type of relationship against the Soviet Union and its client states" (12:147; 11:438). However, this idea of strategic consensus did not correspond to Gulf states regional perceptions. The Gulf states were far more worried about regional and domestic problems than they were about the external Soviet threat (11:438). A case in point was when the White House cited the "Soviet threat" as the primary reason for including five AWACS aircraft with the F-15 enhancement equipment already promised Saudi Arabia. The next day, the Saudi Minister of Petroleum, Ahmed Zaki Yamani, told a New York audience that Israel, not the Soviet Union, posed the primary threat to Saudi Arabia (22:1068).

Despite the urgings of Secretary Haig and the administration, the Gulf states remained uninterested in an anti-Soviet regional coalition. Thus, with little progress made in forming an anti-Soviet alliance, Washington moved to a policy which included strengthening its bilateral relations with regional states and improving the RDF. In this process the U.S. increasingly appeared to regard Saudi Arabia as the primary instrument of its Gulf policy (1:117;12:147).

One of the early policy decisions of the Reagan administration was to act on a Saudi arms request which it had inherited from the Carter administration. In 1978 Congress had approved by a narrow margin the request for selling 60 F-15s to Saudi Arabia. The Carter administration had assured Congress the range and firepower of the F-15s would not be increased. However, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Saudis submitted a new arms request to Washington, asking for multiple bomb ejection racks to increase the number of bombs that the F-15s could carry, "super-sidewinder" air-to-air missiles, and tanker aircraft to allow refueling of the F-15s. President Carter received a letter signed by 68 senators asking that the request be rejected. President Carter decided to delay the Saudi request since the election was so near (1:117-118).

In April 1981, the Reagan administration disclosed that it was planning to seek Congressional approval not only for the additional equipment sought by the Saudis but also for sale of five AWACS aircraft. The final Senate vote was 52-48 in favor of the sale (1:120-121). Not only was the vote seen as a victory for President Reagan, but the Saudis viewed the request for AWACS as a test of the strength of their American connection (11:439).

While Washington continued a program of arms sales to and military co-operation with Saudi Arabia, it remained committed to the enhancement of RDF capabilities. With the administration believing that the greatest threat to the region was from the Soviet Union, it also realized that if the Gulf states could not ensure regional security against the Soviets or Soviet-backed aggressors, then the U.S. would have to respond directly (11:439). In October 1981, the link to the Readiness Command was severed and the RDJTF became a separate force with its commander reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. Finally on 1 January 1983, the RDJTF was redesignated as the sixth U.S. unified command. As the new U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), its theatre of operations included Southwest Asia and Northeast Africa (12:153). Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger in his annual report to Congress on the 1983 budget, once again emphasized the importance of the buildup in the RDJTF. He stated that the U.S. strategy for the region in the 1980s should consist of two principle goals:

...to improve our mobility forces and preposition adequate equipment and supplies to deploy and support a RDJTF of sufficient size to deter Soviet aggression; and to provide long-term support and resupply to sustain these forces (9:112).

Although the RDF's primary mission was to deter Soviet aggression in the region, President Reagan hinted that the force might also be used in state-to-state or internal conflicts. During an October 1981 press conference, he stated that the United States would not permit Saudi Arabia to be another Iran (11:440). Following his statement, the Carter Doctrine was expanded to state that the U.S. would "deal with any threat of any kind to the Saudi regime and would keep open the Strait of Hormuz if the Iranians should try to stop shipping through that waterway" (11:440).

Despite the administration's initial emphasis on the issue of Persian Gulf security, a series of events highlighted the Arab-Israeli conflict and moved the administration's emphasis from the Gulf to other areas in the Middle East. These events included the movement of

Syrian missiles into Lebanon, the June 1981 Israeli raid that destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor, the July Israeli air attack on PLO offices in Beirut, Israel's step toward annexing the Golan Heights, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 which later included the involvement of U.S. troops in Lebanon (11:441).

However, American concern shifted to Teheran as Iran won victories in its war with Iraq. From the outset, the administration's policy toward the war was clearly stated:

- (1) strict neutrality, including refusal to sell weapons to either side and appeal to other countries to similarly refrain.
- (2) determination to maintain freedom of navigation in the Gulf.
- (3) support for international efforts to mediate the conflict.
- (4) support for the security of the Gulf nonbelligerents against the spread of hostilities (21:5).

Although officially remaining neutral, the United States, concerned with the war tilting in Iran's favor, adopted two new policies in 1983. Washington expanded its own prohibition on arms sales to Iran into an active campaign which discouraged allied arms sales. This campaign was known as Operation Staunch. The U.S. also began to provide Iraq military intelligence (17:21). This so-called "tilt to Iraq" was not inconsistent with stated U.S. objectives. Washington perceived that Iraq's collapse would have endangered the U.S. interest in the security of the nonbelligerent states in the Gulf (21:5). Although the U.S. did give Iraq intelligence, it provided no weapons to Iraq and turned down informal Iraqi requests for arms (17:21). In addition to Operation Staunch and providing Iraq information, the U.S. gave some covert aid to Iraq's Arab allies against an Iranian invasion or a possible revolution by radical Islamic forces in the Gulf (11:439).

This continues to be the United States official policy toward the Persian Gulf today. However, events that began in late 1986 ushered a more active role for the U.S. in the region. To all appearances, it seemed that the United States had no dealings with Iran. In November 1986, it was disclosed that the U.S. engaged in an arms-for-hostages deal with Teheran. Basically, it appeared that the U.S. was attempting to straddle the fence on its foreign policy in

the Gulf. The attempt to adopt a conciliatory posture toward Iran compromised other interests, most of all, American standing with the Gulf conservatives. Iran threatened both the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) states and their shipping in the Gulf. Kuwait felt particularly threatened by Iran. If the United States protected the GCC states, it would have invariably antagonized Iran. On the other hand, if it tried to conciliate Iran, then it could not defend the conservative states or their oil. During this period of time, the Gulf rulers probably wondered whether the United States would continue the "opening" to Iran even at the expense of its commitment to them. It was during this time that Kuwait approached Moscow for possible protection of Kuwaiti tankers (17:22).

In April 1987, Moscow answered Kuwait's requests by offering to place three of Kuwait's tankers under the protection of the Soviet Union (19:26). In response, the United States rushed in with an offer of its own. Washington was concerned that a security vacuum was developing in the shadow of the Iran-Iraq War, and the Soviets were moving quickly to fill it. Moscow was establishing relations with countries that had always before turned to the West for help. The United States offered to reflag 11 Kuwaiti tankers to American registry and to protect these tankers with naval convoys (19:26). Although the reflagging and protection of the Kuwaiti vessels was undertaken officially in conformance with longstanding policies in the area, it can be argued that Washington offered to reflag the tankers, not so much to keep oil flowing in the Gulf as to "reassure the Kuwaitis, the Saudis, the Emirates and others that they need not rush to Moscow for protection from Iran" (19:26; 18:46).

What originally was to have been a small escort operation now involves a significant fleet of over 30 naval combatants and support ships. U.S. prestige is fully committed to minesweeping and escort duty and Gulf traffic has still been subjected to threats from mines and from small, fast-attack craft (18:45). Additionally, U.S. forces have come into direct confrontation with Iranian Revolutionary Guard Forces. However, the United States' response has been rather tamed so far with the most serious retaliation for an Iranian action being the shelling of two oil platforms used by Revolutionary Guards as communication bases (15:40).

Although the administration insists that it stands ready to maintain the task force as long as oil shipments are in jeopardy, there is concern on Capitol Hill that this policy could lead to war between the U.S. and Iran. However, as



long as the President has public support for his Gulf actions. Congress will not likely challenge him on this issue. Nevertheless, if a serious incident such as the U.S.S. Stark attack would happen again, Congress would likely bring the present Gulf policy to a showdown, especially since this is an election year (15:40).

## Chapter Five

### Future Gulf Policy

For the immediate future, it appears that the Reagan administration is committed to the task of providing protection to Kuwaiti tankers operating in the Gulf. At a news conference in November 1987, President Reagan renewed the commitment, saying, "We are not there to start a war. We are there to protect neutral nations' shipping in international waters. We're...going to continue this task" (15:40). While one could argue whether it was or was not in the U.S. interest to reflag the tankers, the U.S. must continue to provide the escort service and protect shipping while considering how to adjust its future status (18:52). The only thing worse than not acting to help "our friends" is abandoning them once we have decided to do so. The Gulf states realize the U.S. has demonstrated in recent years a capacity to shift policies abruptly. They remember all too well the lessons of South Vietnam, the Shah of Iran, and Lebanon (19:27).

However, the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers and escorting them in the Gulf is not a sensible long-term Gulf policy. The United States is probably "unable, for domestic political reasons, to make the commitment that would be required to enforce tranquility" (18:48) in the region. The long-term policy of the U.S. should not be providing convoy protection but in helping the Gulf nations provide their own protection. It is in the U.S. interest for the Gulf countries to have a credible military force, capable of responding to local threats, and with possible assistance, to regional threats. No matter which country wins the war, the Iranian and Iraqi military will remain the most experienced and likely the most effective forces in the Gulf. These countries should be balanced by other indigenous forces in the area (18:49). The Pentagon should be assisting the Gulf countries to this end instead of "planning on whether the U.S.S. Iowa should replace the U.S.S. New Jersey in the Gulf" (18:53).

Along the same lines of developing credible forces, the United States should continue selling equipment to Saudi Arabia. However, the equipment should be in line with the

long-term goal of the GCC taking real responsibility for Gulf security (18:54).

In a broader sense, the United States needs to state clearly and convincingly what its Gulf policy is. It is especially important to get that message across to Iran. Washington needs to state its firm support for Iran's territorial integrity and independence. The U.S. also needs to state that it accepts that the current regime has "de facto control, and it will not oppose its legitimacy" (18:49; 21:11). At the same time, Washington should make it clear that it has no more interest in the preservation of the Saddam regime than it has in the survival of the Khomeini regime. However, Iran's insistence on the overthrow of the Iraqi leadership as a condition for ending the war is unacceptable international conduct (21:12). Additionally, the U.S. must voice its beliefs that it does not accept Iran's right to seek the overthrow of other governments in the area, be it Iraq, Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia (18:49).

The United States must reinforce its diplomatic efforts in an attempt to bring the war to an end. More intensive support should be given to the efforts of the United Nations in its quest to bring the conflict to an end. Although previous efforts have fallen short for the last six years, it is important for the U.S. to be seen as on the side of those trying to bring peace (21:12-13).

One lesson which the United States has not learned in its relationships with Gulf nations is that no matter what the present danger is in the Gulf, the GCC states will not ignore their other, more longstanding, obsession--the Arab-Israeli conflict. History has shown that these two concerns are "not mutually exclusive, but tend to fuel one another" (21:9). Leaders of the region will continue to keep the Middle East peace process near the forefront in determining the quality of their countries' relationships with the United States. Therefore, the U.S. must continue to try and find a solution to the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian problem. However, nothing the U.S. is likely to be able to do in the foreseeable future concerning the peace process is likely to meet the aspirations of the Gulf states (21:9).

Finally, no matter what the U.S. policy will be in the near future, a familiar pattern will likely develop. When the threat seems particularly military and especially threatening, the Gulf states are likely to move quickly toward military cooperation with the United States to protect their sea lanes and airspace. However, they will never come as close as some in Washington would like. When

the threat appears more political, or seems to be waning, the states will tend to distance themselves as far from the United States as seems prudent (21:10). This is the world that the U.S. must operate in.

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